

County of Los Angeles  
**DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SOCIAL SERVICES**

12860 CROSSROADS PARKWAY SOUTH • CITY OF INDUSTRY, CALIFORNIA 91746  
Tel (562) 908-8400 • Fax (562) 908-0459



Philip L. Browning  
Director



October 1, 2007

**TO:** Each Supervisor

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. Browning', is written over the 'FROM' line.

**FROM:** Philip L. Browning, Director

**SUBJECT: GENERAL RELIEF SURVEY REPORTS: "HOMELESSNESS AND HELP SEEKING" AND "FOOD INSECURITY AND HUNGER"**

I am submitting to your Board two reports on General Relief (GR) participants. The reports were prepared by our Department to share with you and the community information we have on homelessness, requests for help from family and community, food insecurity and hunger among GR participants. Both reports are based upon a self-report survey of 1123 respondents conducted across the county in DPSS offices.

The main findings of the first report, titled "*Homelessness and Help Seeking*" are:

- Most of the respondents reported homelessness (up to 60%) by indicating that they slept in places not meant for sleep (cars, outside, garage, etc.).
- Of those that identified themselves as homeless, nearly half (about 45%) have been homeless for 12 months or more.
- Many GR participants across the county reported that in the past 6 months they had not sought help from family, friends, or community.

The main findings of the second report, titled "*Food Insecurity and Hunger*" are:

- 84% experienced food insecurity in the past 12 months, that is, they cut the size of their meals or skipped meals because they couldn't afford more food.
- About half (52%) experienced extreme food insecurity (hunger) in the past 12 months.

*"To Enrich Lives Through Effective And Caring Service"*

The findings contained in these two reports are useful because they replace anecdotal evidence with the empirical evidence, and confirm the marked severity of these conditions among GR participants. This information is especially relevant in the context of current efforts by the County of Los Angeles to prevent and reduce homelessness:

1. General Relief Emergency Housing Program – Emergency Housing vendor hotels are available for applicants of GR who declare that they are homeless and appear to be otherwise potentially eligible to GR benefits. Homeless applicants are offered housing vouchers for referral to the vendor hotels or contracted shelters on the same day of application. Upon GR approval, the housing allowance is included in the monthly grant, eliminating the need for vouchers. For single room occupancy facilities, vendors are reimbursed at the rate of \$24 per night; dormitory facilities are reimbursed at the rate of \$16 per night.
2. Move-In Assistance for Single Adults – Commencing March 2007, the Department will pay for last month's rent, security deposits, utility turn-on fees, and moving expenses, e.g., truck rental, up to a total of \$800, plus up to \$405 for a stove and/or refrigerator if not available in the new housing. The target populations for this program include current and former General Relief and Food Stamp participants who are receiving Supplemental Security Income.
3. General Relief Housing Subsidy and Case Management – Provides up to \$300/month rental subsidy payable to the landlord and linkage/access to necessary supportive services needed by an individual to maintain housing, increase employment and/or receipt of SSI/SSP benefits. Program is targeted to assist 900 GR homeless individuals. Between July 25, 2006 and January 31, 2007, a total of 127 subsidies have been issued.
4. DPSS/DHS Homeless Release Project – Eligibility Workers (EWs) out-stationed at LAC+USC Medical Center take applications and process cases for patients being released from the hospital who are homeless and potentially eligible for DPSS-administered programs. On an as-needed basis, the EWs also travel to Martin Luther King, Jr./Drew Medical Center, Harbor/UCLA Medical Center and Olive View Medical Center to interview applicants for benefits. A total of 77 applications were approved from July 2006 to December 2006.
5. DPSS/Sheriff Homeless Release Project – Intake eligibility staff travel to the Men's Central Jail and Century Regional Detention Facility to interview and process cases for inmates being released who are homeless and potentially eligible for General Relief, Food Stamps and/or CalWORKs. Between August 2006 and December 2006, a total of 339 applications were approved.

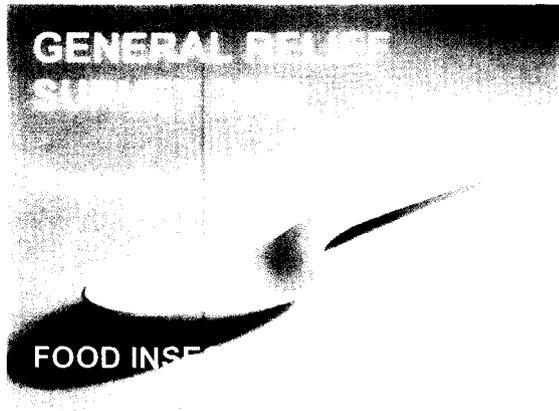
6. By using their Golden State Advantage Card and the Electronic Benefit Transfer System, homeless GR participants are eligible for the Restaurant Meals Program established under the communal dining provision of the Federal Food Stamp Act of 1977. Our Department implemented the program in 2005, and we currently have 200 restaurant providers that are certified for the program and another 60 restaurants in the certification process. This program not only reaches out to our homeless population but also the elderly and disabled.

Please let me know if you have any questions.

PLB:mb

#### Attachments

c: Chief Executive Officer  
County Counsel  
Executive Officer, Board of Supervisors



Department of  
Public Social Services  
Philip L. Browning, Director



*"To enrich lives through effective and caring service"*

In 2005, DPSS completed its first report on homeless families in the CalWORKs program. It provided DPSS with unique information, ranging from frequency and duration of homelessness to reasons that lead to a housing crisis. The motivation for this report was to capture similar data not available from administrative records on participants in the County of Los Angeles General Relief (GR) Program for adults with little or no income and who are not eligible for federal and state cash aid.

GR Program participation requirements for each person are, in part, determined by their employability status. As a condition of cash aid, men and women deemed employable are obliged to engage in employment development activities through the GR Opportunities for Work (GROW). Those judged unemployable, either temporarily or permanently because of conditions such as physical health or mental health, are not required to participate in job development activities. In accordance with GR Program policies, describing people in terms of employability status is an effective indicator of the presence or absence of a host of barriers to the development of self-sufficiency. For the sake of brevity, reference is made to 'employables' and 'unemployables' throughout the report.

### FOOD INSECURITY AND HUNGER

GR participants are at risk for food insecurity because of their severely limited financial resources. Most receive \$221 in cash and \$152 in food stamps per month from DPSS. Food insecurity, as defined by the Life Sciences Research Office, "exists whenever the availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or the

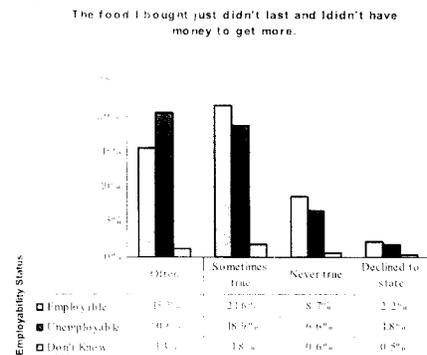
ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways is limited or uncertain."<sup>1</sup> Conversely, food secure individuals do not resort to stealing, scavenging, emergency food supplies to have enough food to meet their basic nutritional needs. Food insecurity can lead to hunger and malnutrition. The extent of food insecurity and hunger among GR participants is unknown. To address this issue, the General Relief Survey included questions from the U.S. Census Bureau's Community Population Survey (CPS). The CPS includes 18 questions to measure food insecurity. Researchers from the National Center for Health Statistics found that six of the 18 items could reliably classify the food security of households without children in the general population.<sup>2</sup> The six include the following: *I bought food that didn't last and didn't have money for more; I couldn't afford to eat balanced meal; Did you or other adults in the household ever cut the size of meals or skipped meals because there wasn't enough money for food?; How often did you or other adults in the household ever cut the size of meals or skipped meals because there wasn't enough money for food?; Did you ever eat less than you felt you should because there wasn't enough money to buy food? Were you ever hungry but didn't eat because you couldn't afford enough food?* These six questions were retained in the General Relief Survey to assure a high level of consistency with Census Bureau's standard of measurement, and are the focus of this report.

<sup>1</sup> Life Sciences Research Office, Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology. Core indicators of nutritional state for difficult-to-sample populations. *Journal of Nutrition*, 1990; 120: 1559-1600.

<sup>2</sup> Blumberg, S. J., Bialostosky, K., Hamilton, W. L., & Briefel, R. R. (1999). The effectiveness of a short form of the household food security scale. *American Journal of Public Health*, 89, 1231-1234.

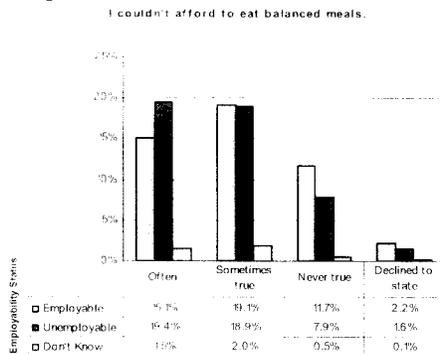
Respondents were asked about their access to food in the last 12 months. Figures 1 - 6 display the responses by employability status of the 854 GR participants who answered all six questions. Employables and unemployables reported significant difficulty in obtaining and maintaining enough food. There is similarity in proportion of positive responses across the six questions; unemployables, as might be expected, reported more difficulty accessing enough food than employables. Unemployables more often bought food that didn't last and couldn't afford to eat balanced meals. Moreover, larger percentages of them cut the size of or skipped meals almost every month, and were more likely to report eating less and being hungry.

**Figure 1**



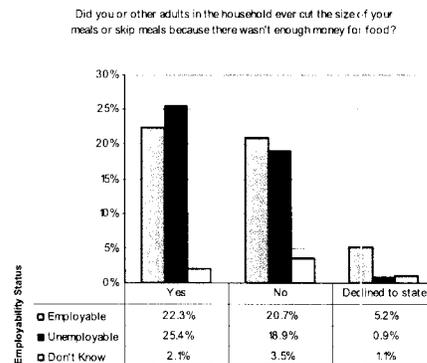
*In the last 12 months, nearly 80% bought food that didn't last and didn't have money for more.*

**Figure 2**



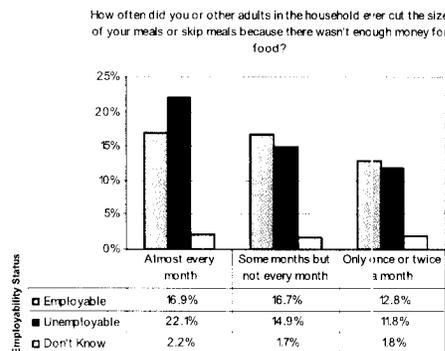
*In the last 12 months, 76% couldn't afford to eat balanced meals.*

**Figure 3a**



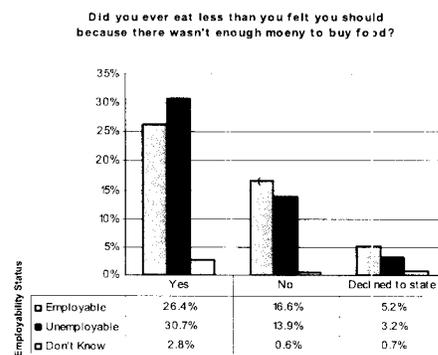
*In the last 12 months, close to 50% cut the size of meals or skipped meals because there wasn't enough money for food.*

**Figure 3b**



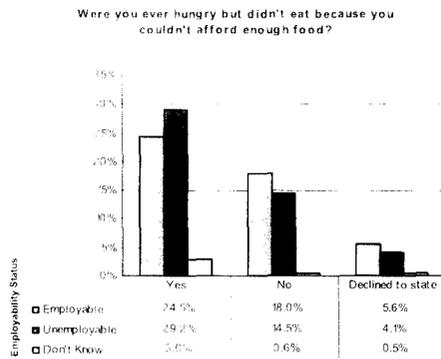
*In the last 12 months, about 41% cut the size of meals or skipped meals because there wasn't enough money for food almost every month.*

**Figure 4**



*In the last 12 months, 60% ate less than they felt they should because there wasn't enough money to buy food.*

**Figure 5**



*In the last 12 months, 57% were hungry but didn't eat because they couldn't afford enough food.*

Food insecurity was calculated by summing the number of affirmative response for each individual. (*Often* and *sometimes* were considered affirmative responses for questions 1 and 2; *almost every* and *some months* were considered affirmative responses for question 3b.) Two or more affirmatives indicated food insecurity and 5 or more affirmatives indicated hunger. In previous research, this scoring method correctly identified the level of food insecurity for 99% of all households without children.<sup>3</sup> Table 1 displays the results of these calculations. Employable and unemployable GR participants reported similarly high levels of food insecurity and hunger.

**TABLE 1 Food Security and Hunger**

	Employable	Unemployable	All in sample
Food insecurity	81.3%	85.8%	84%
Food insecurity with hunger	46.5%	57.8%	52.5%

**DATA COLLECTION**

*Inclusion criteria:* Participants receiving General Relief cash assistance were asked to complete a survey while visiting a DPSS office between October 1, 2005 and January 31, 2006.

*Exclusion criteria:* Men and women submitting applications were not included in the survey for two reasons: First, not all of them were eligible for assistance

<sup>3</sup> Blumberg, S. J., Bialostosky, K., Hamilton, W. L., & Briefel, R. R. (1999). The effectiveness of a short form of the household food security scale. *American Journal of Public Health*, 89, 1231-1234.

and second, the department did not want to burden individuals with paperwork over and above what was required on the day of application.

*Administration:* One-thousand and five-hundred surveys were distributed and data was collected on 1123 participants across 13 office locations. DPSS workers completed the survey with the participant to overcome either a language or literacy barrier. Two-hundred and ninety four participants refused to complete the survey and 83 surveys were never administered.

**LIMITATIONS**

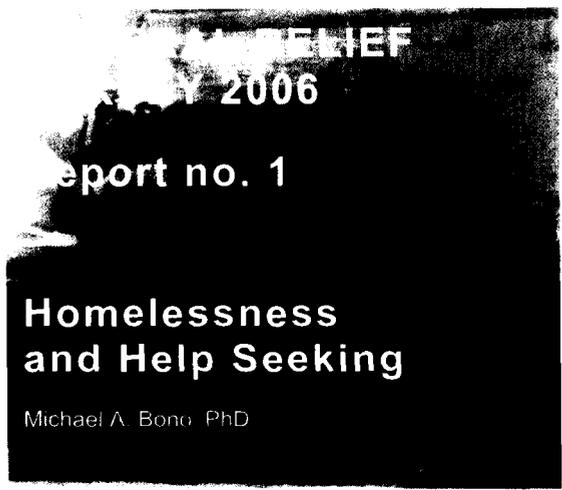
Caution is urged in interpreting the results of this report. Although the demographic characteristics of respondents were representative of the GR caseload, the results should be interpreted as suggestive of trends within the greater GR population rather than precise estimates of occurrence for the population. Moreover, respondents may have been hesitant to disclose certain information.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Numerous people at DPSS and the Chief Administrative Office assisted in gathering data for this report. The author extends thanks to all involved. Photograph courtesy of © Arturo Delfin 2005.

*Contact information: Michael Bono, PhD, County of Los Angeles, Department of Public Social Services, City of Industry, California 91746. michaelbono@dps.lacounty.gov*

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Department of  
Public Social Services  
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apartments and 60% were mostly in places not meant for sleep (see Figure 1). An outdoor bench or covered area, a storage space, a car, and a kitchen are examples of atypical places used for sleep. If we use where a person sleeps as a proxy for homelessness, we would expect that at least 60% of the sample will identify themselves as homeless when asked. Although homeless was the

**Figure 1**

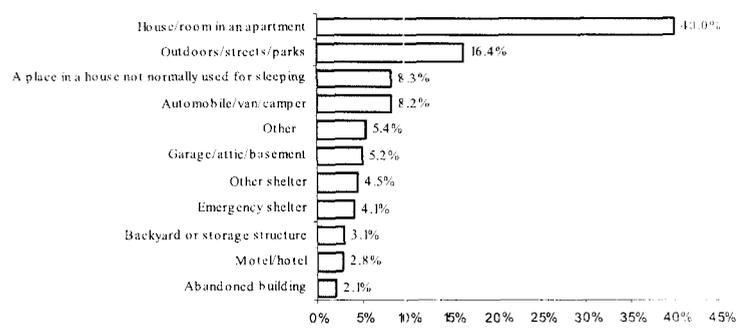
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**HOMELESSNESS**

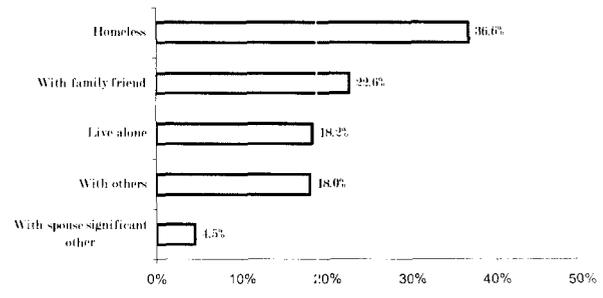
We can tell a lot about a person's living situation if we ask them where they sleep. We found that about 40% of GR participants were in houses and

Which of the following best describes where you are most often sleeping at night?



**Figure 2**

What is your current living situation?

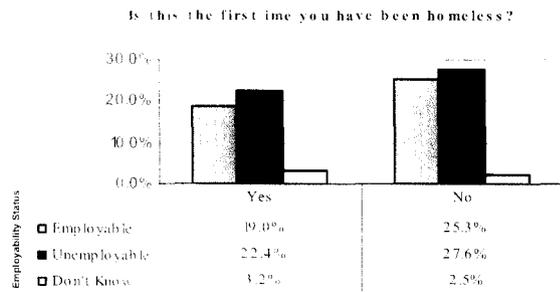


answer given most frequently (see Figure 2) for current living situation, it was not close to the 60% we might have expected knowing the atypical sleep situations reported by most. Looking at subsequent questions about homelessness we found that a slightly greater percentage (40%) answered these.

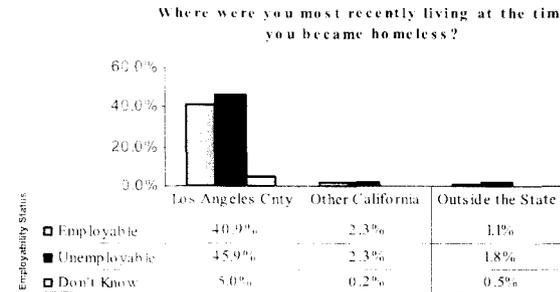
The remainder of the report will focus on responses of this group of 450 GR participants who responded to questions about homelessness. Employability status within this group broke out as follows: 45% were employable, 50% were unemployable, and the remaining 5% did not know. Demographic characteristics of the homeless were similar to those of the August 2006 GR caseload characteristics with the exception of 11% more men in the homeless group (62% male in caseload, 73% male in homeless group).

Majorities in both groups stated this was not the first time they were homeless and that they were living in the County of Los Angeles when they became homeless this time (see Figures 3 and 4).

**Figure 3**

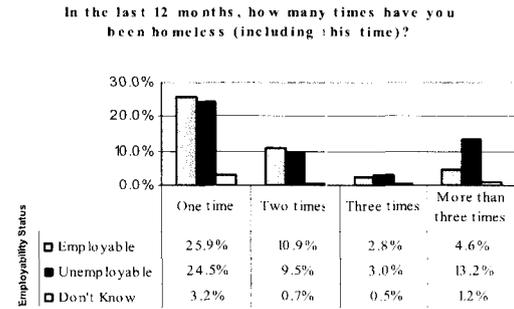


**Figure 4**



Looking at Figures 5 and 6 we see that a majority in both groups experienced homelessness once or twice. A difference emerged at the highest end of frequency in that unemployables (the tall brown bar on the right) were nearly three times more likely to have more than three spells of homelessness than employables. According to frequency criteria of three or more, between 25% - 34% of the 450 identified as homeless was chronically homeless.

**Figure 5**



**Figure 6**

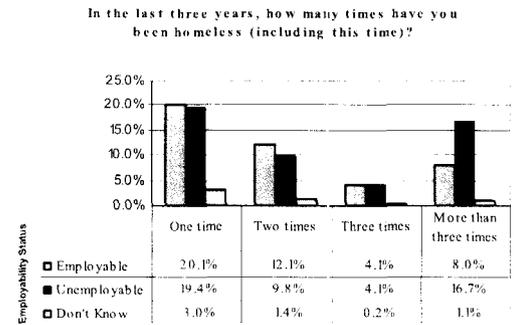
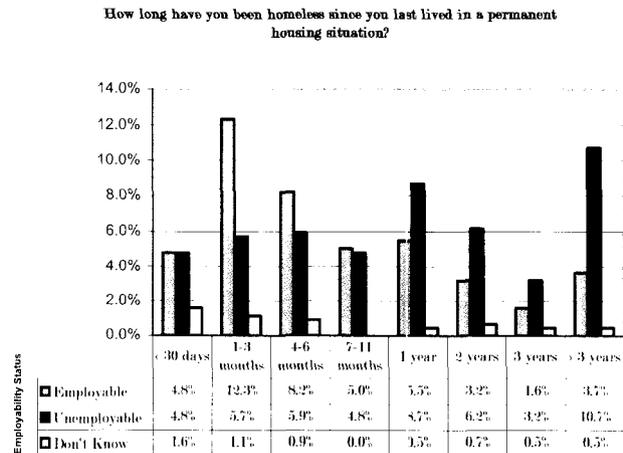


Figure 7 displays information about duration of homelessness. Again, looking at the colors of the bars we notice differences; the blue bars (for employables) are taller on the left and the brown bars (for unemployables) are taller on the right, especially the far right and suggest that employables experience less chronic homelessness than unemployables. We speculate that this makes sense because employables, though marginally attached to the labor force, are likely to have a better chance of

**Figure 7**

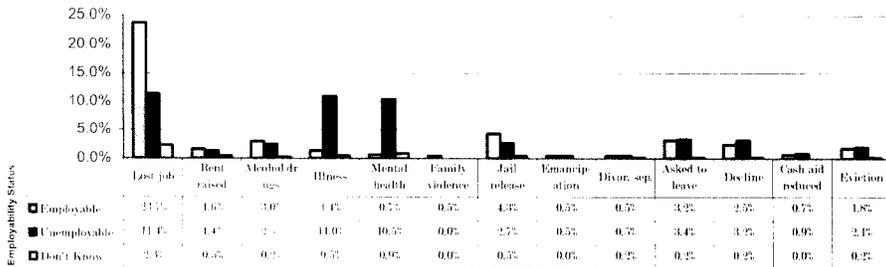


overcoming homelessness because of more opportunities to increase income. According to our duration criteria of 12 months or more, about 45% was chronically homeless. We conclude using both types of criteria that between 25% - 45% were chronically homeless.

Many reasons were endorsed by both groups of respondents to explain conditions that led to becoming homeless (see Figure 8). Chief among them were job loss and physical and mental disabilities. Unemployables reported physical illness and mental health issues about 10 times more than employables.

**Figure 8**

What do you think is the main reason or condition that led to your current homelessness?

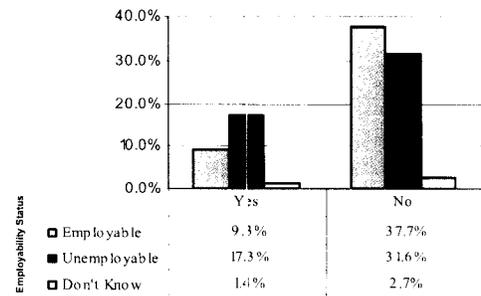


**HELP SEEKING BY THE 1123 RESPONDENTS**

Given the greater occurrence of physical and mental disability among unemployable GR participants, we might expect them to seek help more often than employables because they have a greater need for assistance. This was the case for medical care, but not other forms of assistance. More help was requested from friends and family than social assistance agencies. Across all questions about help seeking, a minority of men and women reported they asked for help in the past six months (see Figures 9-13).

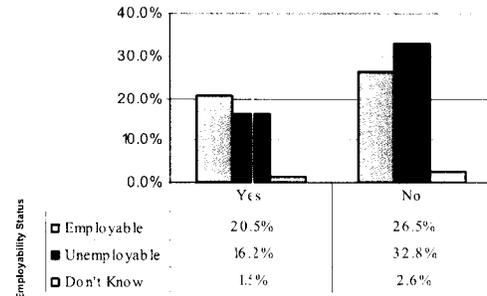
**Figure 9**

During the last 6 months, did you ask for help from a free clinic?



**Figure 10**

During the past 6 months, did you receive money/food/housing/clothing/transportation from friends or relatives?



**Figure 11**

During the past 6 months, did you ask for help from a religious group?

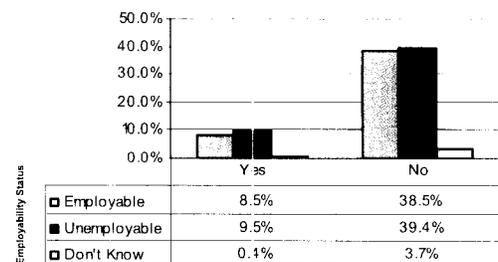


Figure 12

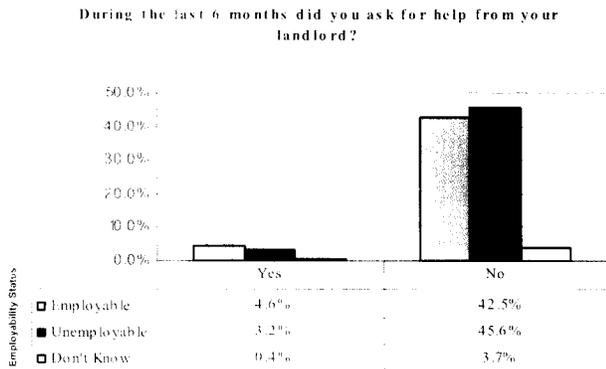
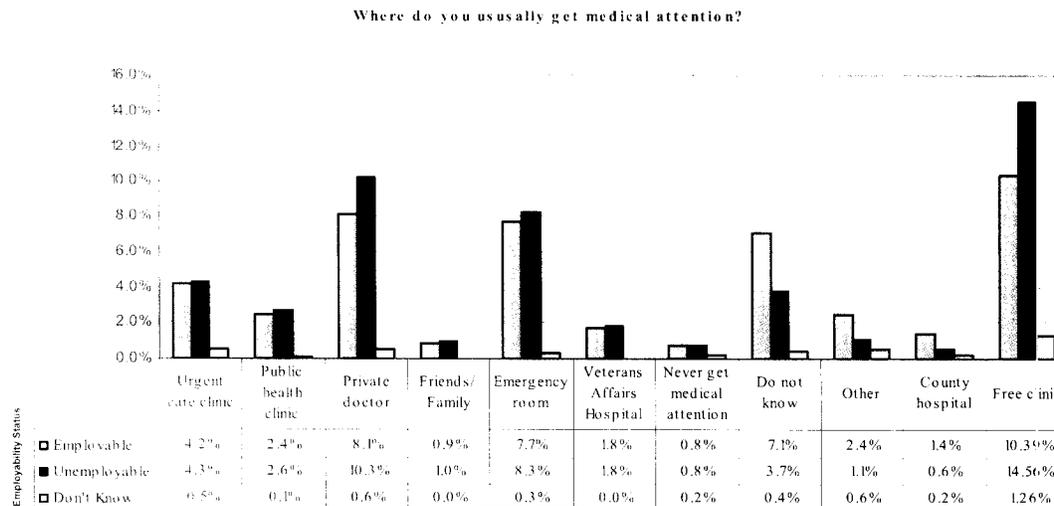


Figure 13



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